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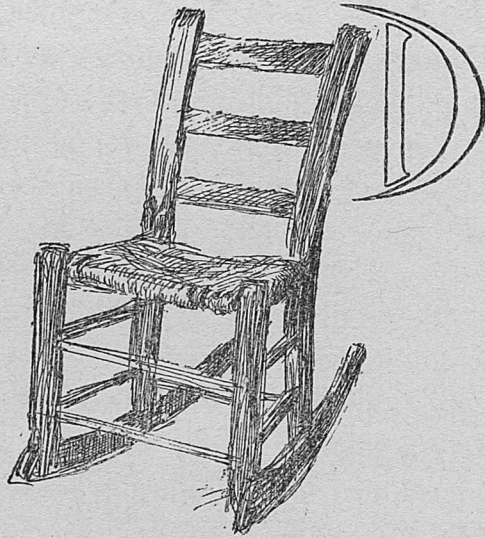
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PART OF AN ARTIST'S LETTER



RIVING to the country school-house, where Jessie (the pet of this household) teaches, we went up and down hill, last Friday, among wonderful color and great decorative designs by Mother Nature; along a level road, for a while, where the blue distance made my heart ache, and old farm houses suggested many things—among them old fire-places, with picturesque old women sitting

over the embers, knitting, and cats asleep and cider and apples and nuts and things. At one of the most promising of these, I was suddenly seized by thirst. The carriage was stopped, and as no one else was thirsty, I went in alone to get a drink.

I could have helped myself without ceremony, as the pump and a tin-cup were just by the door, but I knocked to ask, and caught a glimpse of a black and beautiful fire-place, and an old woman picking over something in her lap. I lost my head and pushed by the prim, carrot-haired maiden of doubtful age who opened the door. She must have been surprised, and her surprise must have increased steadily during the short time I stayed, for I began by making a most unexpected remark—"O, that's what I want to see," and when asked by the old lady to sit down, I must have seemed much confused and guilty. They were picking over wild grapes. The prim girl moved very silently about the room doing something, and then sat down by the fire and looked into her lap and never said anything nor showed a sign of being conscious of my existence.

If the others hadn't been waiting in the carriage everything would have turned out well, no doubt, but in my hurry I made

one blunder after another and I know the old lady thought me a rogue of some sort. She wanted to talk about crops and stock, but instead of pretending to be interested in such things, as I should have done if there had been time, I jerkily remarked that she had a fine old fire-place, and before she got over wondering at that, asked her if I might come and paint it. Her answer surprised and rather nettled me. She said she "guessed it wasn't worth while." She was so complacent withal that I felt that art was a failure and had no business to exist. I ought to have backed out then and gotten away, but I looked at the fire-place and an old blackened corner stair which started two steps up and then remembered to have a door to itself, and I hung on. These glances about the room added to the old lady's suspicions, if she had any, or may be they first aroused them. At any rate, she got a degree colder and when I spoke again of painting the old fire-place, she wanted to know how much it would cost. When I said, "Nothing at all, I only ask your permission to paint it for myself," she crushed me again with, "I guess it ain't worth while."

I writhed under this and couldn't help saying, with a laugh, which meant that I was the best judge of that, "O, I would find it so, I'm sure." By this time there was a well-established antagonism between us.

"When would you do it?"

"Some day soon, I hope."

"How long would it take?"

"I suppose about two days."

"Well, I guess it ain't worth while."

And there was such a final accent this time that I got up to go and said I was sorry and good afternoon (which nearly choked me), and got outside of the door (the carrot-haired girl didn't look up or move), and by a great effort of will abstained from banging the door after me. I went out to the carriage (it wasn't long happening, though there was so much happened) as

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fast as possible. A man on a wagon, which was passing, asked me if I used tobacco, and I gave him a cigar, which made me feel better. I hoped the ugly old thing saw me. Then I was cross to the horse and didn't quite recover till evening when somebody suggested, and all agreed, that the woman thought I wanted to give her fire-place a coat of paint.

I tried to believe that was it, but I don't know. It doesn't help things much anyhow. She thought I was a book-agent, at the least, and if the whole thing were not such a joke (on me) I'd never think of it with any feeling but one of chagrin.

* * *



EMILE ZOLA
on "plein-air"
painting

I recollect very well some of the last academic and romantic exhibitions of about 1863. The "open-air" look had not triumphed, the general effect was one of bitumen smeared canvas, with a baked tone and the half shadows of the workshop. Then, fifteen years later, after the victorious and much discussed influence of Manet, I recall some new exhibitions bathed in the clear light of full sunshine. It was like an invasion of light, a care for the truth which made of each picture frame a large window opened upon nature. And yesterday, after fifteen years more, I saw the rising of a sort of mystic fog among the general clearness of the work. There is yet the love for clear painting, but the reality is distorted, the striving for character and novelty carries the artist too far.

If I were to analyze these three halting places in our art, they would appear to me a powerful image of the change in our ideas. My generation was compelled to open the windows wide upon nature, to see all, to say all. In her now, even with the least conscientious, ends the long effort of positive philosophy.

*From an address
to the Association
of Students,
of Paris*